

VIII. ATTACK AND WITHDRAWAL

LaPrade and Desobry wanted the high ground and this was their plan--that three tanks would strike northward along the Houffalize road and four tanks would hit east toward the high ground west of Bourcy. With each group of tanks would go one and one-half platoons of infantry for their close-in support. In between these two armored groups moving along the road, LaPrade's paratroopers would spread themselves over the middle ground. One company would advance south over the Bourcy Road, another off to the left of it would extend to the Houffalize road and the third company would go toward the high ground at Vaux. In this way armor and infantry would spread out fanwise as they left Noville and started for the commanding ridges.(1)

However, the preliminaries were not propitious. Noville was already taking a pounding from the enemy artillery. The Germans

Map No 7

were firing by the clock and dropping 20 to 30 shells into the defensive position every ten minutes. The houses and several of the vehicles were afire. A proper reconnaissance became impossible; the assembly went off badly. Still, the attack got away at 1430, somewhat unsteadily.(2)

The line had scarcely moved out from the houses when an artillery concentration landed in the middle of Co C of 506th which was on the right flank.(3) A number of men were hit but the company kept moving. Bullet fire from enemy positions on the high ground bit into the infantry ranks and slowed their advance. The little groups worked their way along, dashing on to favorable ground, stopping there to fire, then going on to the next cover point.(4)

But elsewhere along the line except on the far left where Co B kept moving, the attack was already flagging. The tanks and armored infantry decided the attack was impossible so moved back to their holes, not even realizing that the paratroopers were continuing to

attack in any strength.(5) Company A was blocked by heavy tank fire immediately and after a small advance was forced to return to the village. But on the flanks, B and C went on until they reached the lower slopes of the objective ridges and started to climb. At that moment the enemy tanks came against them, supported by some infantry. Some of the paratroopers kept going; their snow-covered bodies were found on the ridges weeks later.(6) The companies went to earth and sought whatever cover was at hand. Then they continued to slug it out with their small arms as best they could; they could scarcely see the enemy at any time. The fog was closing down again and it was mixed with the smoke drifting over from the fires of Noville. The ground was held until dark.

(7) At dark LaPrade's men fell back on Noville. The fighting on the slopes had cost the battalion heavily but the men thought they had caused equal losses on the enemy. From the town three TDs had exchanged fire at about 1500 yards with the enemy tanks and had kept them from coming on, but whether they had done any real hurt to the enemy could not be seen.(8)

For one hour after the return to Noville the front was deathly quiet.(9) LaPrade's men had had no chance to dig in prior to the attack so they sought refuge in the houses.(10) LaPrade improved his CP by moving a heavy clothes closet in front of the window.(11) The Germans resumed their bombardment of the town and in the middle of the shelling a platoon of TDs from the 705th Bn reported for duty.(12) Further tightening the defense, Gen Higgins arrived in Noville and directed that the entire force be formed into CCB with LaPrade in command.(13) The plan was for Co B to defend to the northwest, Co A to the northeast and Co C to cover the southern half of the perimeter while the armored group held in the center of the town ready to strike out in any direction.(14) A few minutes after LaPrade was placed in command, an 88 shell landed in the street outside the CP. The explosion shattered the clothes closet and both commanders were struck down by fragments.(15) LaPrade was killed and Desobry wounded. Maj Robert F Harwick, LaPrade's executive, who had rushed back from a leave in Paris to join his battalion and had arrived

in Noville just at the close of the afternoon fighting, took command of the combined force. The armor passed into the hands of Maj Charles L Hustead.(16)

For the men of CCB who were within the town the rest of the night was comparatively quiet. Their peace was punctured at times by the dropping of a few artillery shells and out beyond the wall of fog they could hear the noise of an enemy build-up.(17) There was little quiet, however, along the infantry perimeter. Enemy tanks in two's and three's and supported by infantry probed toward them. When warned by small arms or bazooka fire, they checked and blazed away at the positions from which they had seen the flashes. The accompanying infantry tried to infiltrate through the lines. These small penetrations and the resulting fire were such that it was almost impossible to maintain wire communication with the outposts. For the paratroopers those hours were a nightmare of surprise fire, ominous noise and confusion, but when morning came the light revealed that two of the enemy tanks had been

knocked out by bazooka fire.(18)

These opening blows in the first round at Noville had been enough to convince McAuliffe that the enemy was full of fight.(19) After that first day they would never seem as strong to him again and the impression would deepen that their attacks were coming on in diminishing volume.(20) But on the first day he looked toward his northern sector with increasing concern. In the afternoon of 19 December 3d Bn of 506th had been ordered to move up to Foy between Bastogne and Noville and establish a line there, with the 2d Bn moving to Luzery as a regimental reserve. When this move was made, Co H on the right made contact with the 501st Regt by patrol and Co G on the left joined with 502d Regt, maintaining a strong point in Recogne. That night all platoons of Co C of 705th TD Bn were attached to the 506th Regt and McAuliffe got ready to employ as much of the strength of 502d Regt along his northern flank as the morrow would prove necessary.(21)

This small, confused action had reverberated

all the way back to Corps. At around 1620 Col Robert F Sink, CO, 506th Regt, called Division and said that it was getting very hot at Noville. He wanted to withdraw the forward battalion to a point north of Foy. McAuliffe then called Middleton and relayed Sink's report of the situation. Middleton said, "No, if we are to hold on to Bastogne, you cannot keep falling back." Sink was called and told the battalion was not authorized to withdraw.

IX. DOUBTS AND DECISIONS

Yet on the whole that first night in Bastogne the situation was good, and it was largely the intuition and hunch and driving energy of the leaders which had made it so. The day had proved that in the few minutes allowed him the night before, McAuliffe had sized up the position properly.(1) He had been tossed into a battle in which nearly all the major facts pertaining to the movement of forces were either unknown or obscure. Yet he had rejected Corps' suggestion that the Division be assembled to southwest of Bastogne.(2) And in his hasty reconnaissance out to the westward with Kinnard he had unerringly chosen a site for his camp which placed it at maximum advantage with respect to his own deployments and all future movements of the enemy.(3) Though he had no way of knowing it at the time, his center of equilibrium was on the ground farthest removed from the early dangers of the encirclement

Illustration No 14

although his two eastward-facing regiments were pointed directly toward the avenues along which the Germans would make their first approaches. The first day's results proved that the angels had been with him as he made his first decision.

There was only one grave error in the opening arrangements. Lt Col David Gold, the Division Surgeon, and Lt Col Carl W Kohls, the Division Supply Officer, had picked out a conveniently located crossroads to the westward of the Division assembly area and decided that this must be the rear, if there were such a thing.(4) The Division hospital was set up on the crossroads. Near midnight of 19 December the 327th Regt was told to send a motorized patrol to crossroads "X"--the site of the evacuation center.(5) The patrol was to investigate and clear up reports of machine-gun fire in that vicinity. They encountered no fire but the hospital was gone-Gold and all his officers and the men of the clearing company had been captured by the enemy. There must have been a fight, for dead Germans dressed in

Illustration No 15

civilian clothes were found strewn over the ground, though there were no bodies of American soldiers.(6) The bulk of the Division medical supplies had been captured or destroyed.(7) Division called on Corps for medical help, and all Division units were notified that casualties would be evacuated to the 501st Regt's aid station in Bastogne. One platoon of the 429th Medical Collecting Company, then located at Jodenville, was made available to 101st.(8) Until the night of 21 December the platoon used its five ambulances and two weapons carriers to carry some of the wounded back to the 635th Medical Clearing Company. Then the Germans cut across the road and contact was lost with the clearing platoon. An abandoned medical corps supply dump and the chance discovery of another depot in Bastogne containing blankets, litters, splint baskets and other hospital items helped the situation. Yet there continued to be a critical shortage of bed clothing, litters, penicillin, surgical instruments and surgeons.

(9) The losses of the first day of battle had not put any unusual stress on the medical facilities.(10) But later in the fight when

Bastogne became encircled, many of the wounded would have to lie on concrete floors with little or no cover. The blankets of the dead were collected so that there would be a chance for the living, and the shattered homes of Bastogne were searched for any kind of quilting.

(11)

Roberts had been at Chateau-Thierry in 1918 and had well remembered the things that happened during the rout of an army.(12) In his first conversation with Middleton wherein the general had outlined the missions which sent the three combat teams of CCB to Wardin, Longvilly and Noville on the night of 18 December, he had foreseen one of the main problems. Middleton said to him, "The 28th Infantry Division and the 9th Armored are ahead of us. They are badly cut up. The situation is fluid." Roberts replied, "Sir, there will be stragglers. I want authority to use these men."(13) Middleton agreed orally and later confirmed it with a written message: "Major General Middleton directs that you have authority to take over all or any part of Reserve Command, 9th Armored,

Illustration No 16

in case they show the slightest inclination to retire. Anything you do to prevent falling back in that area will be given fullest backing."(14)

He set his net to catch the drifters. Headquarters Company was instructed to keep hot food ready all day at a central point in Bastogne. A detail stood by to get the men into billets around the square. MPs were stationed at the road crossings in the south of Bastogne with instructions to stop every soldier who was trying to get away from the battle and turn him back to the CCB area. About 250 stragglers were reorganized in Bastogne on 19 December. Some were men from the 9th Armd; most were from the 28th Division. In this way Team Snafu was born, and within the next week it came to include 600 men, lead by casual officers, but more severely handicapped by the fact that they were short of equipment and transportation so long as the siege lasted.(15) Team Snafu was a reservoir for all. The stragglers went into it; the regular units drew from it as they had need.

Any organized units heading south were also

also commandeered. At 1400 on 19 December the 73d Armd FA Bn of CCR, 9th Armd, moved through Bastogne. Roberts watched it go by before realizing that it was his for the taking.(16) He sent a staff officer to bring the battalion back and within a few minutes the battalion commander reported at his CP. Roberts told him to put the battalion in position with the 420th Battalion. The commander returned to his battalion but found that there was insufficient fuel and could not make the return trip.(17) The 58th Armd FA Bn was stopped and put into position with the 420th, where its twelve guns fired during the next day. Just before the Germans closed the roads to the southward, this unit heard that it had been cut off from Bastogne so it moved to the west.(18) The 771st FA Bn--a negro unit--was commandeered on 21 December and their 155mm hows gave body to the artillery throughout the siege.(19) Roberts found eight undelivered tanks, complete with their ordnance crews in the town and he inducted them into his organization.(20)

Roberts had worried greatly about the

security of the town itself as he had only part of his engineer battalion and the AAA battalion as reserve.(21) McAuliffe wanted to keep his own reserve as mobile as possible and couldn't see assigning one of his battalions to garrison the town.(22) A task force from CCB, 9th Armd Div, entered Bastogne to learn the situation but was ordered by higher authority to withdraw to Leglise.(23) A request to 10th Armd for the use of the reserve command was turned down.(24) So finally Roberts committed Team Snafu, under command of Capt Charles Brown of 110th Inf to the close-in defense of Bastogne.(25) Team Snafu's complexion was somewhat changed on the following morning, 20 December, when Brig Gen George A Davis of 28th Div arrived in Bastogne with a request that CCB attack toward Wiltz. It couldn't be done as by that hour all of Roberts' forces were fully committed. Not long after Gen Davis departed CCB was ordered by Corps to release all 28th Div stragglers to their own command.(26)

Throughout the first day of battle there had been losses and a few minor gains in 101st's already strained supply situation. In the

907th GLI FA BN Lt Col Nelson, worried because his ammunition supply was rapidly reaching the vanishing point, dispatched searching convoys toward what he thought was the Division rear. They moved westward and had been gone about six hours before Nelson grew aware that he had sent his trucks into enemy ground and they were already cut off. A second convoy of five trucks and trailers was sent toward Neufchateau under S Sgt Vincent Morgan, a supply sergeant. Morgan was told that if he could not get M3 ammunition (this is standard for the 105mm M3 which is a gun especially adapted for glider use) he was to bring back some M2 ammunition which the manual said could be used in an emergency.(27) The fortitude with which this young non-com carried out his assignment was one of the finest things of the siege. He returned late that night through heavy shelling and small arms fire about one hour before the cutting of the road of his inbound journey. He had first gone to Neufchateau and on being disappointed there he had driven far to the northwestward, covering in all about 75 miles.

On his trucks were 1500 rounds of M2. It was the only resupply of ammunition received by the Division before the air resupply came in.(28)

That partly compensated for a stroke of bad luck. The two convoys of the Division quartermaster and ordnance companies reached the Division rear area late at night and were told to remain at a crossroads in the woods (P448630). Lacking time in which to reconnoiter the area the two companies left all trucks parked on highway N4 facing west.(29) Shortly after midnight on 20 December Division was notified that the service area was receiving machine-gun fire and a few minutes later came the message "Evidence indicates service troops have disappeared."(30) That alarm was enough; within five minutes a message was on its way to Corps asking for quartermaster and ordnance help.

(31) After being flushed by the fire the two companies headed west and then south. Most of the trucks got through to the Corps rear and on the next day Capt John L Patterson of the 801st Ord Maint Co, taking a different route, got into Bastogne with two trucks bringing 500

gallons of gasoline. He then turned south again to bring the remainder of the convoy forward. By that time the Germans had already closed the road.(32) Such was the shortage of gasoline in Bastogne through most of the siege that vehicles were fueled only just before they went out on a run so that there would be no loss of gasoline if any vehicle was hit while standing by.(33)

X. THE REPULSE

It was a night for drifters. As the darkness grew, more men from the elements which had been shattered to east of Bastogne came moving back through the regimental lines. Few of them stayed. Ewell and his officers talked to these men. They could tell very little of what had happened to them. Many of them were inarticulate. The infantrymen from the 28th Div trickled in in groups of three or four. They made no attempt to organize themselves and they did not for the most part wish to be organized by anyone else. Some of these straggling infantry would ask Ewell's men, "What are you doing?" Upon being told, "We are fighting Germans," they would look at the paratroopers as if they were stark mad. However, not all were like that. Some who seemed utterly wretched and spent when they came to within the lines, upon being handed a K ration, would eat it and look around and ask where they

Illustration No 17

could get a rifle. They were ready to fight again. On the other hand, to some of the drifters food and companionship made no difference. They had been shocked so badly that they wanted only to keep on drifting. They were allowed to do so. This disorder had no ill effect on the combat force. The demoralization did not seem to fray the nerves of the men who were still engaging and they accepted it as a natural product of battle.(1)

One battalion of field artillery, the 109th from 28th Div, came through and attached itself to the 907th GLI FA Battalion. Those groups from the 9th Armd which had been compelled to withdraw from the advanced ground along the Longvilly road were in good order and high spirits when they reached the lines. One platoon of armored infantry attached itself to Homan's battalion and helped them carry the fight during the next several days.(2) Seven tanks arrived from the 9th and constituted themselves a small task force operating in support of the battalion. At 0200 the 2d Plat of Co B, 705th TD Bn, arrived with four TDs and took position on the south edge of Bizory.(3)

These reinforcements got there in the nick of time. At 0530, while 501st was patrolling toward its front, the 2d Bn got an attack over the same big hill to the east of Bizory where they had been stopped by the German reconnaissance force the day before. At a range of 3000 yards, the TD men saw six enemy tanks rolling toward them from the southeast. Sgt Floyd A Johnson led his section to the hill north of Bizory and put the two TDs on either side of the road. 1st Lt Frederic Mallon led the second section to the higher ground southeast of town and waited for the tanks in an open field.(4)

The firing opened at 0730, the TDs withholding their fire from the enemy infantry so as not to compromise an engagement with the enemy armor, which by this time comprised one Mark IV, one Mark V and two 75mm self-propelled guns.(5) They were following the infantry line by 400 yards--it was a full battalion of infantry, the 2d of the 76 Regiment, 26 Volks-grenadier Division.(6) In the first long range exchange of fire one TD was disabled and its loader killed by a direct hit on the turret;

it limped away to the rear. The second TD in this section, after knocking out the Mark IV tank, pulled back into Bizory where in taking up another position, it damaged the tube of its gun by running against a building and became incapacitated. The other TD section opened fire on the Mark IV tank and one SP gun at 600 yards, destroying both vehicles.(7)

This was the crux of the engagement: all of the infighting of that morning was done by the heavy guns.(8) Homan's machine guns had opened up on the German infantry while the tanks were coming on and by so doing had kept them at a distance. Within a few minutes of this first body check to the German battalion all the artillery which McAuliffe could turn eastward from Bastogne blasted them. Homan's infantry along the ridge was too far distant to do much bullet damage to the advancing formation but the men had a clear view of the German ranks coming on slowly, of the automatic fire making them hesitate, of the shells falling among them, of the attack gradually spending itself and of the remaining enemy breaking away.

to the northward to escape the fire.(9) Ewell's own infantry losses were almost nothing, but two TDs were out for the time being and the defense had lost two tanks. So ended the first, though not the most ruinous, of the piecemeal efforts which on this day presaged the failure of a campaign. The fighting had lasted about two hours, the artillery barrage perhaps 20 minutes.(10) Prisoners of war later captured from the 76 Regiment said that their losses had been terrible.(11)

There followed a daylong wait along Ewell's front. About 1900 the Germans put a heavy shelling from tanks and SP guns on sensitive points over the ground held by 501st Regt--Bizory, Mont and the road junctions. The bombardment severed all of the wires connecting the battalions with rear.(12)

As the German artillery slacked off, 1st Bn radioed to Ewell that the enemy was charging straight down the road to Neffe. Bottomly's infantry could hear the tanks coming on: it was so dark that they could tell little else.(13)

All the guns from the 11 battalions in Bastogne dropped a dam of fire across the road about 100-250 yards west of Neffe: it was the heaviest and most effective American defensive fire during the siege. Three German tanks--two of them Panthers and one a Tiger Royal--were struck down just as they drew past the last houses in the village.(14) Some German infantry, which had moved down the Bastogne road before the barrage dropped, met their fate from machine guns which Co B had posted in a house by the side of the road. That company took the shock without having to yield one yard of ground. Their strongpoint controlled the terrain so well that not one German drew near enough to close on the infantry line.(15) They were killed to the last man, and for weeks later, their grotesque forms along the roadside, heaped over by the Ardennes snows, showed where the death march ended. The most forward of these bodies were 300 yards ahead of the shattered tanks.(16)

The thrust from Neffe coincided with an assault on 3d Bn's position at Mont, though here the battle took a quite different form.

Illustration No 18

because of the presence of Templeton's TDs.(17) The 1st Plat of Co B, 705th TD Bn, under command of 1st Lt Robert Andrews, had arrived to reinforce Griswold's position on the evening of 19 December. One TD was posted at the bend in the road (576577). From here it could cover both the dirt road winding across the valley from Neffe and a draw leading off to the southward. A second TD took position by the last house, which put it somewhat behind, but in line with, the TD blocking the Neffe road. The other section was placed on the north side of Mont to check any tank advance from directly across the valley. The TDs held these positions until the hour came when they were most needed, on the night of 20 December.(18)

Between 1900 and 1930 the enemy struck through the fields lying between Neffe and Mont, advancing against Griswold's left. But the presence of the TDs had intimidated the German armor. It took refuge in the little wood lying just west of the Neffe chateau and from the grove shelled Mont. The German infantry advanced under this fire.(19) Enemy self-propelled

guns moved along the railway line from Neffe a short distance (the rails here ran through a cut) and went to work on the same target.(20) These two lines of fire converged on Griswold's positions at almost a right angle; the men in the forward line had to give ground, falling back on the village.(21) The most forward of the TDs, commanded by Sgt George N Schmidt, became their rallying point. Schmidt unloaded most of his crew and told them to join the fight with small arms. He then joined the infantry machine gunners who were already searching the down-slopes with every automatic gun the battalion could bring to bear; in the next few minutes he threw 2000 rounds of .50 cal at the enemy. Lt Andrews used a radio-equipped jeep as his CP and central control station and his security section as ammunition carriers, to feed the stuff up to whichever TD was calling for it most urgently. The other three TDs, under Sgt Darrell J Lindley, were shooting at the railway line. They at first tried to spot the SP guns by firing at muzzle blasts; when that failed, they put flares up over the valley.(22)

The fighting died about 2300.(23) By that time, the three SP guns were out, and lines of German dead littered the hillside.(24) Because of the dark the defenders of Mont had no clear idea of why their automatic fire had made such a clean reaping of the German attack or of where the attack had broken. But in the light of the next morning they could see what had happened. The hillside between Neffe and Mont is crossed in both directions by barbed wire fences which are spaced between 30 and 50 yards apart, with five or six strands in each fence. In ordinary times they are used, apparently, as feeder pens for cattle. With the tank fire behind them the Germans tried to come right through this fenced area without first destroying the fences in any way or equipping infantry to cut them. On coming to the fences they tried to climb through but the spaces were small and the equipment was bulky. Griswold's men had perfectly clear fields of fire and so did the TD supporting them. The fences were as effective as any entanglement. The evenly spaced lines of dead told the story. They had charged right into a giant mantrap.(25)

Ewell had the impression that night that the 901 Panzer Regiment had about expended itself and that it could no longer muster enough men to be an effective offensive force. They had been pretty well chewed up before they got to Neffe and Ewell's men had furthered the good work.

(26)

So on 19 December the Germans, having contacted 501st on a wide front, at first drew back the defensive positions. On 20 December they made three attacks and the infantry, armor and TDs in Ewell's sector beat them down. (27) On 21 December, and thereafter, they gave over their attack against this part of the front. The road to Bastogne did not lie through Ewell.

XI. RUNNING BATTLE

In Noville they were running short of armor piercing shells as the morning of 20 December dawned.(1) In Bastogne, McAuliffe was wondering whether Noville was worth what he might have to pay to hold it, and was about to reach a decision.(2) Deprived of any support from the commanding ridges, Noville is not a military position but just another village on low ground, and a perfect sinkhole for fog. The issue was already hanging in balance because of the ammunition situation and the mis-carriage of the American attack on 19 December; only a little more pressure would tip it.(3)

On 506th Regt's left flank, 502d Regt had passed a quiet night. In midafternoon of 19 December 502d had moved to Longchamps and established a perimeter defense there. Third Battalion deployed on a high hill to south of the village. First Battalion was in the Bois de Niblamont which was southward of the hill.

Initially 1st Bn had held half of the front, but at 2400 McAuliffe told Lt Col Steve Chappuis, the Regimental Commander, that inasmuch as 502d Regt was the Division reserve, he could leave only one battalion on the northward-facing line. Second Battalion drew the assignment. It made no difference in any case, for though the battalion was stretched 7000 yards, there was no action anywhere along its front that night. (4)

But to the eastward where 506th Regt stood guard, the boys who had prayed for morning soon wondered why. (5) At 0730 two enemy tanks came hell-roaring through the field along the Houffalize road, swung in beside the first building of Noville, wheeled so as to protect each other and then stopped. They had knocked out a jeep with one shell on the road in, and had sprayed forward with their machine guns as they rushed. Unseeing, they came to a halt within ten yards of a bazooka team and one tank was set on fire by the first rocket fired. Sgt Michael Lesniak, a tank commander, had heard the armor roaring along. He dismounted, walked up the main street for a look, swung his

gun in the right direction after he had returned to his own tank and moved to the center of the street. He fired before the enemy realized that he had gone into action and his first round finished the tank. A third German tank which remained just north along the road but out of sight in the fog threw a few loose shells in the town and one of them hit Lesniak's tank, damaging the turret.(6)

That was the beginning. Almost nothing that followed could be seen as clearly. During the next two hours the defensive perimeter was under constant attack from the German armor and infantry but the enemy pressure developed quite unevenly as if their forces, too, were groping or were remaining active simply to conceal some larger design. It was battle with the bewildering shifts of a montage; there were momentary exposures and quick shifting of scene. The enemy came on in groups of a few tanks supported by small parties of infantry and were held off by the armored infantry and paratroopers with their own weapons just long enough to let a friendly tank or TD get into firing position.

Fog, mixed with smoke from the burning buildings, again mantled the country between the village and the ridges, diffusing the efforts of both forces. It was all but impossible for anyone to get any impression of how the tide was moving; they could tell only what went on right before their eyes.(7)

Curiously enough the TD men of 2d Plat, Co C, 705th Bn, who had taken position in the south of Noville, had the impression that in these early morning hours the infantry was standing off a full-fledged attack.(8) They could see only 100 yards beyond their own guns and they could hear large numbers of enemy tracked vehicles moving toward them through the fog. Their imaginings were further stimulated by a direct hit on one TD right at the outset which killed the gunner, Cpl Stephen Cook, and wounded several of the crew.(9) For two hours they fired in the general direction of where they thought the German armor was massing; they could see no targets but they thought their ~~unaimed~~ unobserved fire might have some deterring effect.(10) At 1000 the fog quite suddenly lifted and the sky became almost clear.(11) In the field within

view of the TD force were 15 German tanks; they were proceeding toward their own lines at about 1000 yards range. Four of the tanks were hit and disabled and the TD men were confident that their own shells did it. They had seen their shots hit home and had watched Pvt Steve E Reed empty seven boxes of .50 cal ammunition into the crews as they tried to flee across the fields.(12)

Just before the fog had cleared a Tiger tank had charged right into the heart of Noville. Visibility among the buildings was just about zero. The tank stopped in the front of the CP of Co B, 20th Armd Inf Battalion. The tanker swung his gun uncertainly toward the door. Billlett said a quick prayer.(13) A joker beside him remarked, "Don't look now, but there is an 88 pointing at you."(14) Lesniak's tank was within 20 yards but the German had failed to see him in the fog; by rotating his damaged turret just a short space to the right Lesniak had his gun dead on the Tiger. At 20 yards he fired three rounds of 75mm at the German armor without doing any apparent damage. The German

quickly put his tank into reverse. But the left track ran up and over a jeep. The jeep was completely crushed and at the same time it fouled the track and beached the tank. The German kept on pushing back--the jeep under him. He next collided with a halftrack and the tank tipped dangerously over on its right side.(15) That was enough for the German crew. They jumped from the tank and ran out of town, going through the American lines without getting a shot fired at them, such was the thickness of the fog. The radio inside the Tiger was on a busy channel and talk flowed on inside the dead tank. It looked like a wide-open opportunity, but before the CP could round up a German-speaking individual, the channel went out.(16) The tankers destroyed this Tiger with thermite and later on they caught hell from Roberts for not bringing the tank back to Bastogne.(17) But they had a good excuse. The losses among the tank driving personnel were already such that they did not have enough men to maneuver their own armor. Two tanks were without drivers and partly without crews. So the tankers asked the paratroopers

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if there were any men among them who could handle tanks and two of Harwick's men climbed aboard and started out with the Shermans. Later on they paid for it with their lives, both tanks being hit during the withdrawal.(18)

They knew now that they would not be able to hold Noville much longer. The clearing of the fog revealed to them a situation which they had already suspected. During the night the men on the outposts had heard enemy armor moving across their rear, particularly to the southwestward.(19) In the morning, patrols ^{although} had gone out, and while they couldn't tell much because of the enveloping fog, they found enough to confirm the fact that enemy forces were between them and Bastogne. Hustead had lost radio contact with CCB during the night.(20) So in the morning he sent 1st Lt Herman C Jacobs to Foy; he was to get to 3d Bn of 506th Regt in that village and use their radio to inform CCB of the situation and request that the Noville garrison be either withdrawn or reinforced. He carried out the mission in a halftrack. Several times on the way to Foy

he blundered into enemy parties and had to shoot his way through. But at Foy he found no one; by this time 3d Bn was engaging the enemy to the south of the village. Jacobs continued on to Bastogne. Roberts sent his only available reserve--an antiaircraft platoon--forward but the platoon was blocked by enemy forces before getting to Foy.(21) The Germans were coming across the road from both sides. When the fog rolled away the men in Noville could look southward and see the circling armor. Making their isolation more complete, they had lost all contact with the main body of 506th Regt and they did not know whether the situation at Foy was developing for or against them.(22)

The Germans had already made their onfall against Sink's support position. In early morning 3d Bn of 506th received light shelling and flat trajectory fire along its lines at Foy. During the night and through the first hours of daylight the enemy had taken advantage of the heavy fog and had moved in very close to the American outposts, though it seems probable that they knew very little about the location

of the American lines and were only groping.

(23) At 0800 a force of about two companies of infantry supported by three tanks attacked toward the ground defended by Cos I and H. By 0900, they had driven in far enough to put direct fire on the American positions with their supporting weapons. (24) The TDs of 3d Plat, Rcn Co of the 705th Bn were not in position to give the infantry any direct fire support during the engagement. They were in the woods south of Foy when the attack came on, and in the latter stages of the action they were established as roadblocks; but during that morning they did not fire on any enemy armor. (25) Company G in Recogne was engaged by another company of infantry supported by three tanks. The CP of 3d Bn in Foy came under direct fire from an enemy tank. Until 1030 the battalion held its ground in Foy and it then withdrew to the high ground south of the village. Here it reformed for the counterattack. (26)

It was about midmorning when Division called 502d Regt and directed that 3d Bn under Lt Col

John P Stopka attack through Recogne and tie into the force at Noville, thus reestablishing the left flank. The battalion crossed the line of departure at 1130 and then pushed right on, meeting little opposition. But when it came to Recogne the order was changed. At somewhere around noon McAuliffe had decided that Noville wasn't important enough to warrant a last-ditch stand on the inferior ground around the village. Stopka was instructed to make a limited attack forward so as to cover the extrication of Harwick's men. Third Battalion of 506th was to fight the same kind of an action on the other flank. It was figured that the Noville force could sideslip into 502d's area once Stopka's battalion got up to it. However, the battalion fought its way only a short distance past Recogne when the plan was again changed. Col Robert F Sink, commanding 506th, had looked the situation over and decided that the best way out was for Harwick's force to strike straight down the main road. Stopka's battalion remained in position on a line running through Recogne with its left flank extended westward to join Second Battalion. Its advance

Map No 8

had been made wholly without artillery support because of the dense fog.(27)

Radio communication between Bastogne and Noville was not reestablished until 1300.(28)

The order then came through on the artillery radio net to Harwick and Hustead that the command was to withdraw to the Bastogne perimeter of defense. They were told that an attack on Foy was being made immediately to relieve the pressure on Noville. When they saw that the attention of the enemy was diverted to the Foy attack, they were to make a break for the south.

(29)

Local problems of the withdrawal were not too great. A considerable amount of ammunition had to be destroyed. There were more than 50 wounded men awaiting evacuation.(30) However, the shrinkage of manpower in the Noville force through battlefield deaths and casualties already evacuated was great enough that, despite a steady loss in vehicles, there remained enough tanks, halftracks and trucks to move all the casualties and permit all the armored people and most of the paratroopers to ride out of Noville.

Company C of 506th was already south of the village in a reserve position, and accordingly, it was nominated as the advance guard and would move out on foot.(31) Three tanks would accompany Co C. The halftracks and jeeps loaded with the wounded would come next in the column. Then would follow the main body of the personnel carriers and armor. Those of the infantry who couldn't find a ride would move out in file on both sides of the road. Company B of 506th was to be the rear guard, supported by four TDs. One platoon from that company was detailed to destroy everything that could not be evacuated.(32)

At 1315, Co C took off. At 1325 the first vehicles quit Noville.(33) Hustead and his engineer officer had prepared the ammunition dump for demolition; the dump was alongside a building and they were hopeful that the blast would lay the building low and block the highway. Hustead waited until the last vehicle had passed the ammunition point. He then gave the engineer the signal to set off the delayed charge. They heard the explosion as they moved on down the road.(34)

The start was good. Until 1300 the air had been crystal clear for most of the noon hour.

Then, as if Providence again chose to intervene in their favor, the fog closed around them and screened their departure from the enemy.

(35) They knew that they could be heard and they wondered whether the Germans would try to take them in flank while they were in motion.

(36) But the fire which might have been turned against the road was spared them and they moved along quite easily, except for an occasional flurry of bullets. A little protecting belt of armor--one armored M8, followed by four halftracks and five medium tanks--moved in front of the vehicles containing the wounded.

(37) Just beyond the village, one of the tanks broke down and had to be destroyed with thermite. The armored car took off at full speed without waiting for the others, and got to Bastogne without receiving any fire. The column continued on toward Foy and the halftracks had come abreast of a house within 500 yards of the village when occurred one of those chance things that, though wholly insignificant in themselves, may change the entire course of action.

(38)

In the leading halftrack the shutter dropped and the driver could not see. The driver raised up and moved his arm to adjust the shutter and Maj James B Duncan mistook the gesture and thought that the man had been wounded and was holding his eyes. Duncan reached over and pulled the hand brake. That stopped the entire column.(39) The first half-track was rammed from behind by the second half-track which had lost its brakes. The third half-track pulled up close. At that moment bullets and grenades bit into the column from both sides of the road. The men could not see clearly whom they were fighting but they knew that some of the Germans were deployed in the ditches and that they were drawing fire also from the house. Duncan figured that he had to fight it out on that ground. The machine gunners in the halftracks put heavy fire on the ditches and the dismounted riflemen, after flattening themselves, blazed away with their tommy guns. In ten minutes the skirmish was over. Some of the enemy had been cut down. Others had dispersed into the fog.(40)

The fourth halftrack had withdrawn a short distance to keep from jamming the column. Duncan had gone back that way. The amount of firing that he could hear from forward among the halftracks, mingled with the noise of the firing by Sink's 3d Bn, which was attacking north toward Foy, gave Duncan an exaggerated idea of the importance of the action. He asked for the tanks to get forward and fire on the house.(41) Meanwhile the three halftracks had shoved on. Back through the column all of the men had dismounted and had taken to the ditches. Hustead came forward to see what was blocking the road and he met Duncan near the head of the column. Both officers then tried to get the tanks in motion. The crew of the first tank told Hustead they had no ammunition. The second tank couldn't fire either; there was no ammunition for the big gun and the machine gun was jammed. Duncan prodded two of the tanks into carrying out the order and they shelled the house until it caught fire. Thereupon, they backed away. Duncan was still worrying because he could hear small arms fire,^{so} and he ordered them to go in again.(42) As they moved away they

were caught broadside by fire from three German tanks who had slipped through the fog from the eastward. The first American tank caught fire. In the second American tank the driver was hit and the tank came to a halt.(43) Because of the murk the men only a few yards back in the column could get no true idea of what was happening. Capt William G Schultz, the tank commander, was in the fifth tank. He walked up to the third tank, which was short of personnel, and drove on down the road past the two disabled tanks. They were beyond his help and he thought that if he kept moving the rest of the column would follow.(44) In this he was mistaken. He drove through Foy alone and about a quarter-mile beyond the village his tank was hit by a shell from an enemy tank and disabled. Schultz and his men got out alive and walked on into Bastogne.(45) Meanwhile, Hustead and Billett were striving to get the column moving. One of 705th's TDs whipped up from the rear of the column to try to get a line on the yet unseen German tanks. A Sherman tank from the forward group backed straight toward the TD and the TD, reversing direction to save itself,

backed over and crushed a jeep.(46) The Sherman moved up to have another go at the house; it was hit by a shell from a German tank and exploded in flames. The turret blew off into the road and blocked the passage.(47) The driver of the fifth tank, who had been with Schultz, had moved up and taken over the second tank just before it was demolished. This left the fifth tank driverless. As the road was now blocked by the turret, Billett and Hustead moved back and forth among the tankers looking for a driver so they could start the column moving across the field to Foy.(48) There was not a single response. Every tanker replied that he was qualified for some other kind of work but he couldn't move a tank. The paratroopers and the armored infantry jumped to a conclusion that the men were dogging it. They walked among the tankers cursing them and calling them "yellow bastards"; they threatened to beat up one man whom they suspected of being a driver. But they were all wrong about it. Most of these men were new replacements. Some were cooks, some were mechanics and some were riflemen. But they were tankers only in that they belonged to

a tank organization.(49) The impasse at Foy could be charged to the replacement system.

The paratroopers farther back along the road had picked themselves up and moved out through the fields on both sides. The group on the right swept all the way to Foy, met no organized resistance but bagged a few Germans whom they found wandering around in the fog.

(50) The TD force at the rear also became restive and at 1430 1st Lt Tom E Toms led his vehicles down a little stream line on the right of the road and via this defilade entered Foy from the west.(51) He had gotten there in ten minutes. The paratroopers who had swung out to the right reached the village at the same time. The TDs were not quite through for the day.(52)

The foot troops who had swung out to east of the road were stopped by the line of fire which the unseen German tanks were throwing at the Shermans in the front of the column. They sent word back to the main body.(53) However, the danger was removed by help from an unexpected quarter. PFC Thomas E Gallagher was

driving one of the TDs which had gone into Foy and was on his way to an assembly area in a woods south of the village when he was stopped by an officer of the 3d Bn of 506th. He knew the location of the German tanks and told Gallagher to go after them. Gallagher said he had no crew and no one to work the gun. Two paratroopers climbed into the TD and took over the gun. Gallagher then moved forward and with the infantrymen doing the firing the TD engaged one tank at 200 yards range and destroyed it. The other tank escaped over the hill. (54)

Because of the fog Hustead and Billett hadn't seen the infantry parties move out to right and left. Billett felt that he ought to clear a route for the tanks and vehicles to advance and he sent back for Co B of the 20th. One platoon remained back in the column with the vehicles and he started out with the other two platoons moving through the fields to the right. Hustead had the same idea ^{but} and didn't know that it had already been put into execution twice on this same flank. He gathered about 20 paratroopers together and made an

additional hook to the right. The odd part of it was that though this party groped its way forward over the same ground as the others, they did so in time to reap part of the harvest. The enemy groups around Foy were now feeling the heat from both directions. Hustead's sweep towards Foy resulted in the capture of 43 Germans. In the village Hustead met troops of the 3d Bn, 506th who had advanced from the south and he asked them: "Has the armor come through?" The men had seen the three halftracks and Schultz's tank go by and they thought this was the armor Hustead was talking about. So they reassured him. Hustead borrowed a jeep and drove to Bastogne to report to Roberts that he had completed his mission. But when he got to town he learned that he was mistaken and could only tell Roberts that the column was on its way and should soon arrive.(55)

Hustead in Bastogne and Billett in Foy were both on the radio urging the column to come around to the right. But Duncan and 2d Lt Burleigh P Oxford were already jockeying the column through the fields. The fifth tank was on its way. A

crew of paratroopers had climbed aboard after telling the tankers, "We'll learn how to run the son of a bitch."(56) When the column drew into Foy some of the vehicles became stuck in the soft ground. Oxford dismounted all of the personnel and got the winches and the manpower working first on extricating the vehicles which contained the wounded. At dusk the column was finding its way through Foy and past the 3d Bn lines.(57) The command in Bastogne had intended that the force would go into a defensive position on the high ground south of Foy. But Hustead told Roberts that the column was dead beat and had better be brought into Bastogne.

(58) The TDs under Lt Toms remained in Foy supporting the Third Battalion.(59)

Team Desobry had gone to Noville with 15 tanks; it limped back with only 4 tanks.(60) First Battalion of 506th Regt was in full strength when it went to Team Desobry's support; it lost 13 officers and 199 enlisted men at Noville.(61) By their combined efforts they had destroyed or badly crippled somewhere between 20 and 30 enemy tanks of all types including not

less than 3 Mark VI's.(62) Their probable successes would include many more. The 506th Regt estimated that the assaults of the German infantry had cost the enemy strength equal to half a regiment.(63)

Yet all of these material measurements of what had been achieved were mean and meager when weighed against the fact that the men of Noville had held their ground for a decisive 48 hours during which time the defense of Bastogne had opportunity to organize and to become confident of its own strength.(64)

XII. FIRST ACTION AT MARVIE

(20 December)

At 0645 on 20 December, the enemy shelled O'Hara's roadblock on the Wiltz-Bastogne road about 1300 yards east of Marvie. The fog was thick and little could be seen of the enemy's movements out along the road. But as the light grew, the tankers could hear enemy armor moving somewhere in the fog up beyond the block. At around 0900 the fog lifted a little and they saw about a dozen enemy ^{soldiers} trying to break up the block. A concentration, fired by the 420th FA Bn, caught this group while they were tugging away at the felled logs. Two were killed (they were later identified as an engineer working party) and the others fled the fire. The enemy then put smoke on the roadblock—enough to conceal the block and the terrain right around it. Figuring that an infantry attack might be coming, Team O'Hara covered the block with fire from mortars and assault

guns. It is believed that this fire fended off the thrust toward O'Hara's front and deflected it toward Marvie, where five of O'Hara's light tanks had taken up position the night before. (1)

In the meantime Col Joseph H. Harper, commanding the 327th Gli Inf, had been getting acquainted with Col O'Hara. The 327th Regt had taken over the CP at Mande-St-Etienne at 1500 on 19 December and at 1630 the 1st Bn had been attached to Ewell to support his right flank. At 0400 the Regimental CP and the 2d Bn were ordered into Bastogne and at 0600 they marched into the town. (2) Without a pause, 2d Bn marched straight on to Marvie and took over that village from the 326th Engineers. Third Battalion remained in Flamizoulle and established its CP in the woods. (494610)

Second Battalion entered Marvie just about as the enemy first opened fire on O'Hara's road-block. (3) Harper had been told by Division that the reconnaissance group of light tanks would be in support of his Second Battalion. (4) Going

Map No 9

straight away to see O'Hara, he said to him, "I have been told to hold this sector. I understand from Division that you are in support of me and I would like to go on a reconnaissance." O'Hara said, "Let's get started." (5) With them when they went out was Lt Col Roy L. Inman, commanding the Second Battalion. The officers discussed the relationship of their respective forces as they made the reconnaissance. Under the existing arrangement, O'Hara was not under Harper's command, as the armored force still was not attached to Division but was in support only. Inman had moved 2d Bn in on O'Hara's right flank with his line so extended as to secure the village and then bending southwestward to the main road just above Remoifosse. This was a distance of about 2500 yards. The engineers had three outposts distributed over this southeastern facing arc and none of them had as yet been engaged. It was agreed that O'Hara would be responsible for the defense of his immediate front and that Inman, who would take over from the engineers immediately, would be responsible for the sector to right of

O'Hara. (6) Harper then left Inman and drove down the main road toward Remoifosse. He established the southwestward extension of his line on the forward slope of the hill over which the main road passes a little more than half way from Bastogne to Remoifosse. The position thus chosen was a few hundred yards north of where the original engineer outpost had been.

After looking over the situation and making sure that his men were where he wanted them, Harper drove back to Marvie. The jeep reached the road intersection just west of Marvie. There Harper stopped for a moment and debated with himself whether to go on into the village or take the west-running road and have a quick look at the high ground above the village. He decided in favor of the latter and the jeep moved on up the hill. (7)

At 1125 Inman's CP in Marvie reported to O'Hara that they were receiving a great deal of shelling and that they could see enemy tanks coming toward them. (8) This movement had al-

ready been observed from within O'Hara's sector. Yet Harper, driving up the hill at the very moment of the attack, was unaware that anything untoward was breaking until he got to the top of the hill, turned about and saw the enemy guns blazing from the edge of the woods directly southeast of MARVIE and their point-blank fire hitting among the houses of the village. He could see that the fire came from tanks within the wood but he could not be certain how many. The barrage was followed immediately by an advance out of the woods by four enemy tanks and six halftracks.

(9) They were well spread out and they advanced slowly, firing as they came, and drawn on by the prospect of an easy success over the light tanks. The latter kept dodging in and out among the buildings and the enemy fire appeared to closely follow their movements. The light tanks replied futilely with their 37mm guns and the enemy armor appeared to come on more boldly.

(10) Feeling that his presence, rather than helping Inman's men, was drawing more high velocity fire into the town, the light tank com-

mander asked O'Hara for permission to withdraw. (11) It was granted. By then, one of the light tanks had been set afire by a shell burst; a second tank had been hit in the suspension system and made its escape by backing up the hill. Yet Harper did not know all of these things. He saw the tanks quit the village and he concluded that they had been routed and were deserting his infantry. (12) Up on the hill behind Marvie, O'Hara's larger guns kept silent. In front of the oncoming armor a German SP 75mm gun was pacing the advance. Its gunner spotted a halftrack near O'Hara's CP and fired several quick rounds at it. The shells hit an engineer jeep, demolished a one-ton trailer and blew through the lower portion of the CP, killing a cow. The CP was in the first floor of the house and this fire was hitting into the basement under the headquarters.

(13)

The tanks were by now almost broadside to Team O'Hara at 700 yards range. Firing at right angles to their own front, two of O'Hara's medium

tanks opened up on the line of Mark IVs and halftracks. The Germans never saw what hit them; they were still shooting at the light tanks which were pulling out through the end of the village. (14) One Mark IV was blown up by a direct hit from one of the mediums. The other Sherman knocked out a second Mark IV and one of the halftracks, the fire killing all of the tank crew and most of the men in the personnel carrier. One German tank fled to the rear. The fourth tank dashed for Marvie where the infantry destroyed it with bazooka fire. (15) The SP gun, having gotten almost into the village before the Sherman opened fire, tried to turn about. It was hit from all sides and it went up like a torch. (16) In the last stage of the German advance the halftracks had sped forward and increased their interval so that they were almost closing on the first houses when the tank line was destroyed. (17) They kept going. They got to the streets of the village and the infantry jumped down. With one small exception the glider troops stayed right where

they were and met the on-fall without flinching. The attack had come just at the completion of the relief and some of the engineers were moving out of the north end of Marvie. Men from Inman's heavymortar section, stationed in an apple orchard, saw the engineer party leave as the fire began. They could not understand the movement and they thought that part of their own battalion was withdrawing. And so they followed. (18)

Harper, watching all of these things from the hill, made the same mistake as his mortar section. He thought that his men had been stampeded and that the village was gone. He called McAuliffe on the radio, told him what he had seen and said that he was on his way to gather the men and that he would make a counterattack. The car sped back over the route it had come and Harper started to rally the men. Then he learned that most of the party were engineers and that only the mortar squad from among his command had displaced. He told them to get back into the battle and they moved at once. (19) This error in judge-

ment is the only instance during the siege of Bastogne when any American infantry is known to have left its position under fire and without orders. (20)

Harper, still outside the village, called Inman on his radio. The Executive, Maj R. B. Galbreath, answered the call. He said that both Inman and Capt Hugh Evans, CO of Co G, which was holding the village, had been hit by a tank shell while making a reconnaissance just as the German onslaught began: he did not know how badly they were wounded. Harper asked him, "Are you still in the village?" Galbreath answered, "Yes, but the Germans are here also. We expect to drive them out." The close-up fighting continued into the early afternoon. Inman's men stayed in their foxholes. Some died there, shot at ten yards range by machine guns as they tried to stop the halftracks with their bullet fire. Their bodies were almost cut in half where the machine guns had ripped them through. Their comrades found them later sitting stiffly at their weapons. Harper himself inspected these positions;

he noted that every one of his dead was still facing forward as if trying to engage the enemy. (21) The bazooka men had met the attack head on. Some of the enemy infantry, clearing away from the halftracks, had ducked into the houses. The glider men went in after them and cleaned them out house by house. Within two hours 20 Germans were prisoners and 30 were dead in Marvie. 1st Lt Stanley A. Morrison of Co G, who had been captured when the Germans first came into the village, was recaptured by his own men. Inman had lost five men killed. Each of these had been killed in a foxhole while resisting the halftracks. Fifteen men of Co G were wounded in action. (22)

During all that time, Team O'Hara sat high and dry on the ridge, taking no part in the engagement except during the brief gun duel. On the right flank the force received some small arms fire but the enemy made no attempt to close on that side and the armored infantry in O'Hara's position was at too great distance to lend any support to the man in Marvie. That village was

again clear by about 1300. At 1400 some of O'Hara's tankers saw an enemy halftrack stuck in the mud about 150 yards southeast of Marvie. It had been with the striking force during the morning and had become bogged. In the excitement all hands had overlocked it. The tankers quickly knocked it out. (23)

At 1420 the enemy smoked Marvie. Some of the tanks made another sally from the woods but changed their minds. The situation began to ease and Inman's men went about improving their positions, digging their foxholes narrow and very deep and right next, ^{to} the foundations of the houses.

(24) The day ended fairly quietly but there was ensuing a definite change in the weather. The Ardennes was cold and frozen. The ground had firmed up so that the tracked vehicles could get about over the hills in almost any direction. Still no snow had fallen.

Now, as the first skirmish ended around Marvie, the first flurries fell. Soon the ridges were whitening and the snows thickened during the

next few days. Increasing cold, light winds and deep drifts changed many of the characteristics of the battle. One of the problems which pressed most heavily on the commanders was to get their men indoors and keep them from freezing. Villages became places of refuge not only from enemy fire but from the cold. The Belgian villagers, clinging stubbornly to their homes even in the face of the German attack, had to be evacuated to provide cover for the infantry. In a world of white, the forest plantations were the only other areas of easy concealment for troops. The local actions swirled more and more around these two objectives—to capture a few houses or to take a line of fir trees. (25)

XIII THE RESPITE

On the twenty-first and twenty-second the opposing forces around the northeast sector simply sparred with one another.(1) The enemy had been stopped cold at Neffe and Mont by Ewell; the effort to slip through the ground held by O'Hara and Harper had been equally unsuccessful though less costly. After these futile passes, and following the shock action at Noville, the enemy seemed almost to abandon the effort to break through Bastogne and concerned himself with extending the southward flow of his forces on both sides of it so as to complete the encirclement.(2)

The road to Neufchateau was cut on the night of 20 December, isolating Bastogne. McAuliffe had gone that way just a few hours before to talk to the Corps Commander.(3)

It was a pregnant conversation. McAuliffe said that he was certain he could hold on for

at least 48 hours and maybe longer. Middleton replied that he doubted it could be done, since the 116 Panzer Division was coming in on McAuliffe's flank in addition to the three divisions already opposing him. McAuliffe said, "I think we can take care of them," and Middleton replied that he thought not, but that it would have to be a matter for McAuliffe's discretion when he should withdraw. He said that he didn't want to lose Bastogne but he couldn't see how it could be held, and he added that VIII Corps was being reorganized around Neufchateau and that when 101st pulled out, it should come that way. It was important, he said, that the road to the southwestward be kept open as long as possible, and he concluded, "Above all, don't get yourself surrounded."(4)

McAuliffe walked out, jumped in his car and told the driver to make for Bastogne as rapidly as he could get there.(5) He figured he was already surrounded—or just about so. One-half hour after he came over the road, it was cut by the German armor.(6)

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That was, however, a not unmixed evil, for it superinduced an important change in the relationship of the forces in the defense. During the first two days the infantry and the armor had collaborated well but they had not been a team. On opening night, McAuliffe had asked that the armor be attached to him and Col Roberts had said, "What do you know about armor?" McAuliffe replied, "Maybe you want the Division attached to your combat command."(7) It was partly because of this division in the command authority, and partly because the armor and the infantry were strange and new to one another, that during the first stage there was a lack of cohesion.(8) That lack was felt more as a moral than as a tactical thing. The armor along the front seemed to one staff officer "like a will o' the wisp."(9) The armor felt the same way about the infantry. Each force felt that it was propping up the front pretty much unhelped. Neither force was feeling the other nor having any clear idea how much support was being received from it. Liaison was fragmentary. Both tankers and infantrymen had

had to come out of their corners fighting and during the first crucial hours they had no choice but to look straight ahead and slug.

But with the cutting of the Neufchateau road and the isolating of the Bastogne garrison Middleton called McAuliffe and told him that the armor and all others within the circle were under his command.(10)

Middleton also called Roberts and told him, "Your work has been quite satisfactory but I have so many divisions that I can't take the time to study two sets of reports from the same area." Roberts reported himself to McAuliffe to do command liaison and from that time on until the siege was lifted his post was almost exclusively at the 101st CP. The resulting co-ordination was complete. Roberts, a veteran tank commander, was particularly concerned that the armor be used properly. He lashed out against the attempts of infantry commanders to use tanks as roadblocks and he worked specifically to effect a quick release of the armor after each engagement so that there would be a

maximum strength in McAuliffe's mobile reserve. In the middle of the siege he published a mimeographed memorandum to the infantry officers on tank tactics.(11)

It was a curious thing that on 21 December Corps sent an order to CCB that it was to hold the Bastogne line at all costs, as on this day Roberts was well aware that McAuliffe had been authorized to withdraw to the southwest if he thought it necessary.(12) These bookkeeping entries, however, merely confused the issue as from this hour forward the action of all concerned—the Corps commander, the Division commander and the armored force commander—became wholly consistent with the resolve that Bastogne could and would be held.(13)

McAuliffe now had the answer to all of his questions. No situation could have been more clearly defined. During the first two days he had entertained many doubts and had continued to wonder. He had heard about various groups from 28th and 106th Divs which were out fighting somewhere and might fall back upon him.

The 7th Armd was supposed to be somewhere up around St Vith. He had had to worry about the organization of stragglers. At first part of the 28th Div had been screening him on the south flank. Gen Cota had called him on the morning of 20 December and said, "I'd like to see you," and McAuliffe had replied, "I'm too damned busy." Cota then said, "I'll come up to see you."(14) He knew now that Cota would not come calling and that the only friendly situation about which he would have to worry for a while was within a two and one-half mile circle of Bastogne. His support was all within ranging distance of his own 105mm batteries. It was a nice, clear-cut position and it had materialized in about the way that he had expected upon reaching Bastogne.(15)

But what he had not foreseen, and which came like a gift from the gods, was that after the first hard collision, the enemy would give him a comparative respite in which to reflect on his situation and knit his armor and infantry close together, now that both were his to work with as he saw fit. Having spent two days

Illustration No 19

trying to break through Bastogne, the Germans spent the next two riding hard around it. They had failed to crush it; they would try to choke it. But while they were building up around the west and south, the pressure against the city relaxed.(16)

The flow of bubbles on the G-2 overlays, showing the extension of the enemy to the south and westward, was moving along. Panzer Lehr Division had been the first to break upon the Bastogne rock. But 26 Volksgrenadier Division had also come in from the northeast; a captured map showed that it had failed in one of its appointments, for it was to have had the honor of capturing Bastogne.(17) These Germans were traveling light. Their commanders had told them that Bastogne was bursting with American food and they could eat when they got there.(18) Some had gone hungry for three days while trying. Too, the enemy fire power manifested a certain weakness. While his heavy mortars and nebelwerfers were shaking down the store fronts in Bastogne and wounding a few soldiers and civilians, his artillery effort was largely limited

to the covering fires given by the tanks and a relatively few self-propelled guns when his infantry charged forward. It was a phenomenon which G-2 attributed to a critical shortage of ammunition.(19)

The cutting of the Neufchateau road appears in the 101st's record as hardly more than an interesting incident.(20) Up till then, the Division's intelligence of the enemy strength and movements was more notable for its blanks than for its knowledge.(21) The G-2 section had moved cold into an unknown situation and was having to compose its picture piece by piece. There had been no pretty estimates to take over and to build upon.(22) All that Division could know for certain was what it learned from examining the enemy dead or questioning prisoners. That was enough for Lt Col Paul A. Danahy's (Div G-2) main purpose and enough also to satisfy his taste for melodramatic utterance. Eleven dead men had been found on the ground where the hospital was captured. The corpses had civilian clothes—and German military dogtags. Danahy went out to make the

identifications.(23) A few hours after this find, a message from 10th Armd came through CCB to Division saying, "You can expect attacks from Sherman tanks, civilians and almost anything now."(24) Reports came into the G-2 office through the day of Germans killed while wearing American uniforms and of Sherman tanks pouring fire on our lines. Danahy checked up. He found that invariably, where the enemy used American dress, it was mixed with some of their own clothing, so that they could maintain they were in uniform.(25) What he had seen gave him fresh inspirations of prophecy. "Their equipment is augmented by captured U.S. equipment which they do not hesitate to use," he wrote to the commander.(26) Their morale is excellent but will disintegrate as they come in contact with American airborne troops. It is well known that the Germans dislike fighting. The false courage acquired during their recent successes has so far proved insufficient to prevent their becoming road-bound."(27)

While this message was going out to the regiments, the enemy was crossing the Neuf-

chateau road and cutting the last line to the south. Reconnaissance and combat patrols reported strong enemy infiltrations in the areas west and southwest of Bastogne.(28)

In the morning of 21 December, a patrol from "D" of the 90th Ron Sq went down the road to see what the Germans had there. The squadron, under 1st Lt Arthur B. Arnsdorf, consisted of one TD and two squads of infantry. They met a group of 101st men near Isle-le-Pre, then moved on to the vicinity of Halt, where a well-emplaced enemy force made them turn about.(29)

Another armored patrol under Capt Keith J. Anderson went to Clochimont where it observed a large enemy force—riding in American vehicles and dressed in American uniforms.(30)

Later in the morning Team Pyle—14 medium tanks and 200 infantry, mostly from 9th Armd—moved to the vicinity of Senonchamps to assist the 420th Armd Field Artillery. Lieutenant Col Barry D. Browne, in command of the 420th, had received reports that Sibret and Morhet had fallen into enemy hands. He figured that he was out

on a limb and that the enemy might come upon him from either flank. So he turned one of his batteries to fire on Sibret and rushed a forward observer out to adjust on the village. At that moment, he saw the motorized column of the 333d FA Group. They came speeding up the road out of Sibret. Another column came driving hard behind them—men in American clothes and riding American vehicles. They got fairly close to Senonchamps, then stopped, deployed and opened fire with an M8 assault gun. Even as Browne realized they were Germans, they started side-slipping off into the Bois de Fragotte. Team Pyle got there in time to help Browne fill the woods with fire; one battery from the 420th FA Bn and one from the 755th FA Bn (155mmms) also engaged in this action. The infantry and tanks moved west into the woods. Almost immediately, one of the tanks knocked out an enemy 75mm self-propelled gun. The force then advanced into a large clearing in the center of the forest. While crossing the clearing, one of the tanks was disabled by a shell from a high velocity gun somewhere in the woods. The tank lost a

track. A smoke screen was laid to try to cover its withdrawal, but the tank wouldn't budge and had to be destroyed. ^{The} But force then withdrew to a line farther to the east, but within the forest. Additional support kept coming to it until by night Browne was commanding 300 infantry and 19 tanks, in addition to running two battalions of artillery.(31) His troops were covering a sector more than 4,000 yards long and running from south of Senonchamps to the Bastogne-Neufchateau road. All of this had been built up during the day as forces were shifted to meet the attack from the new direction.(32)

But the heavy increase of fire on the left found Danahy ready to meet the emergency. "The cutting of the roads," he wrote in his periodic report to the commanders that evening, "had had no effect upon our present situation except to make travel hazardous."(33)

XIV. "NUTS"

At 1130 on 22 December four Germans, a major, a captain and two enlisted men came up the road from Remoifosse carrying a large white flag. They walked toward the house where Lt Leslie E. Smith from Co F of 327th Regt had his CP after being received on the road by T Sgt Oswald Y. Butler, S Sgt Carl E. Dickinson, and Pfc Ernest D. Prematz of the Medical Detachment. Prematz could speak German. The captain could speak English. He said to Butler, "We are parliamentaires." The party was taken in to see Smith. The two German enlisted men were left at the CP. Smith blindfolded the two officers and led them over the hill to the CP of Capt James F. Adams, CO of Company F. Adams called battalion in Marvie, battalion called regiment in Bastogne and regiment called Division, relaying the word that some Germans had come in with surrender terms. (1) The rumor quickly spread around the front that the

enemy had had enough and that a party had arrived to arrange a surrender. Quiet held the front. The American defenders crawled out of their cover and spent the noon hour shaving, washing and going to the straddle trenches. (2)

Maj Alvin Jones took the terms to McAuliffe and to Lt Col Edward Schmitt, the Adjutant General of the Division, who was Acting Chief of Staff. The paper called for the surrender of the Bastogne garrison and threatened its complete destruction otherwise. (3) It appealed to the "well-known American humanity" to save the people of Bastogne from further suffering. The Americans were to be given two hours in which to consider. The two enemy officers would have to be released by 1400 but another hour would pass before the attack would be resumed. (4)

Harper accompanied Jones to Division Headquarters. The two German officers were left with Adams. Members of the staff were grouped around McAuliffe when Jones arrived. (5) McAuliffe asked someone what the paper contained and

was told that it requested a surrender. He laughed and replied, "Aw, nuts!" It really seemed funny to him at the time. He figured he was giving the Germans "one hell of a beating" and that all of his men knew it. The demand was all out of line with the existing situation.(6)

But he realized that some kind of reply had to be made and he sat down to think it over. He asked the staff what they thought and Kinnard replied, "That first remark of yours would be hard to beat." McAuliffe didn't get it at first and Kinnard told him he meant, "Nuts!" That made all members of the staff enthusiastic and because of their approval McAuliffe sent the message along.(7)

He called Harper in and asked how Harper would reply to the message. Harper pondered for a few minutes but before he could compose anything McAuliffe had given him the paper on which he had written his one-word reply and asked, "Will you see that it's delivered?"

Illustration No 20

Harper answered, "I will deliver it myself.

It will be a lot of fun." McAuliffe told him not to go into the German lines.(8)

Harper returned to Co F. The two Germans were standing in the wood blindfolded and under guard. Harper said, "I have the American commander's reply." The German captain asked, "Is it written or verbal?" Harper said, "It's written." He said to the German major, "I will stick it in your hand." The captain translated. The major asked, "Is the reply negative or affirmative? If it is the latter I will negotiate further."

All of this time the Germans were acting in a very upstage and patronizing manner. Harper was beginning to lose his temper. He said, "The reply is decidedly not affirmative." Then he added, "If you continue this foolish attack your losses will be tremendous." The major nodded his head.

Harper put the two officers in the jeep and

Illustration No 21

took them back to the main road where the German privates were waiting with the white flag. He thereon removed the blindfold and he said to them, speaking through the German captain, "If you don't understand what 'Nuts' means in plain English it is the same as 'Go to hell'. And I will tell you something else—if you continue to attack we will kill every God damn German that tries to break into this city."(9)

The two officers saluted very stiffly. The captain replied, "We will kill many Americans. This is war." It was then 1350.(10)

Harper said, "On your way, Bud, and good luck to you." The four Germans walked on down the road. Harper returned to the house, regretting that his tongue had slipped and that he had wished them good luck.(11)

The rest of the day was comparatively quiet. The wholesale destruction by artillery which the Germans had promised did not materialize. However, at 1555 there was an attack by 50 enemy

against Co F over precisely the same ground where the German mediators had made their entry. It was broken up by small arms and artillery fire. At 1700 another small attack was again pressed to within 200 yards of Co F's lines but was beaten back by fire. The terrain here is a kind of bowl. The Germans came with tanks into the bottom of the bowl and fired up against the foxholes along the slope. The men under Sgt Butler, who had the rifle platoon, and Lt Smith, who had the weapons platoon, held their ground and drove the attackers off with infantry fire alone.(12)

The main event for that day was summed up, though not too neatly, in the G-2 Periodic Report No. 4:

"The Commanding General's answer was, with a sarcastic air of humorous tolerance, emphatically negative. The catastrophic carnage of human lives resulting from the artillery barrage of astronomic proportions which was to be the fate of the defending troops failed to materialize.

The well-known American humanity was considerate of the threatened possible civilian losses by firing artillery concentrations directed at the enemy's impudence."(13)

It was a victory for eloquence at the expense of grammar and quite in keeping with the other grim humors of the day.

That night the Luftwaffe began its bombing attack which was repeated on the next four nights.

(14)